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Atari Online News, Etc.
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->From the Editor's Keyboard

"Saying it like it is!"

I'm going to keep it really short this week. I've run out of Thanksgiving leftovers and have turkey withdrawal pains. And, the entire hospital in which I work is going crackers due to the pending survey next week. Everyone is on edge because of preparation, and hoping that all will go well. So, stress levels are high everywhere, including me. So, I won't attempt to put together a column this week - it's tough to concentrate on other things at the moment. Next week should be a relief!

Until next time...

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->A-ONE User Group Notes! - Meetings, Shows, and Info!

CCAG Show This Weekend.

Buy, sell, trade, play, and see classic video games, computers, peripherals, memorabilia, and more at The Classic Computing and Gaming Show (CCAG) on December 4, 2005 at the National Guard Armory, 3520 Grove Ave. Lorain, Ohio. Vendors, clubs, and collectors will be displaying and selling their retrogaming and retrocomputing goods, from Pong and Atari to Nintendo, Apple and IBM to Commodore and everything in between with many set up for you to play with and explore.

We have 5000+ square feet of space.

<http://www.ccagshow.com/>

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING
compiled by Joe Mirando
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[Editor's note: Joe has obviously had worse turkey withdrawal than I did this past week - he won't have a column this week. Personally, I think he has a couple of drumsticks stashed away somewhere!]

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->In This Week's Gaming Section - PS3 To Get Parental Controls!

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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!

Sony To Put Parental Controls in PlayStation 3

Sony will be placing parental controls in the forthcoming PlayStation 3, falling in line with other video-game console makers that have promised parents the feature, according to the Entertainment Software Association.

Sony's current machine, the PlayStation 2, has access limits for movies, but the controls do not apply to games.

Although details have yet to be released from Sony, many in the industry see the move as part of a larger effort to give parents controls over what their children are watching and playing on digital devices.

In creating the parental controls, Sony is the last of the major console makers to build in access features specific to games.

Microsoft already has such controls in the Xbox 360, which shipped last week. The controls on the Xbox 360 let users set access according to how games are rated.

Microsoft also tweaked the popular Xbox Live online gaming service, giving parents the ability to screen individuals who want to interact with their children.

Although Nintendo does not have parental controls in its machines yet, the company did announce in early November that its next console machine,

Revolution, will have the feature. The console is due to be released during 2006.

Because of the ubiquity of video games, and the increased sophistication of their graphics, the gaming industry has garnered more attention over the past five years.

Parental controls are only part of a larger effort to crack down on violence-themed content that is available to children and teenagers. Legislators have been keen to draft laws that restrict sales of certain types of games, and some parental watchdog groups have blamed violent video games for real-life violence perpetrated by teenagers.

Although parental controls could ease restrictions on the industry, some are hoping that such access also will remove misperceptions about games and their influence on real events.

"Violent games are blamed for problems that spring from other sources," said Jason Della Rocca, program director for the International Game Developers Association. "Anything that reduces that is welcome."

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A-ONE's Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

'Spam' E-mail Filters Getting Better

E-mail "spammers" are aggressive as ever but Internet providers are getting better at blocking junk messages before they reach users' inboxes, according to a U.S. Federal Trade Commission study released on Monday.

The FTC found that spammers continue to "scrape" e-mail addresses from the Web using automated programs that look for the telltale "@" sign.

But up to 96 percent of those messages were blocked by the two Web-based e-mail providers used by the FTC in its test. The FTC did not say which providers it used in its study.

"This encouraging result suggests that anti-spam technologies may be dramatically reducing the burden of spam on consumers," the report said.

The FTC noted that Internet providers still must bear the burden of filtering out those messages.

Consumers can stay off spammers' lists by writing out their addresses in an alternate syntax if they must post them online, the FTC said.

Writing an e-mail addresses as "janedoe (at) isp (com)" rather than "janedoe@isp.com" will fool most spammers' harvesting programs, the FTC said.

E-mail addresses posted on test Web sites were likely to attract spam, but those posted on blogs, chat rooms or other online forums were less likely to become spam magnets, the FTC said.

Agency Weighs Single-Letter Web Addresses

Although Internet domain names may be getting longer or more complex as Web sites creatively squeeze into the crowded ".com" address space, most single-letter names like "a.com" and "b.com" remain unused. That may soon change as the Internet's key oversight agency considers lifting restrictions on the simplest of names.

In response to requests by companies seeking to extend their brands, the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers will chart a course for single-letter Web addresses as early as this weekend, when the ICANN board meets in Vancouver, British Columbia. Those names could start to appear next year.

But the transition won't be easy - and it could lead to six-figure sales of this new online real estate, akin to opening New York's Central Park to development.

"Obviously this is a valuable commodity," said Kurt Pritz, ICANN's vice president for business operations. "How would the name be sold?"

Names are normally released on a first-come, first-served basis for \$10 or less, a policy that favors those who have written programs to automatically and frequently check for a name's availability. Auctioning names to the highest bidder is one possibility.

ICANN also must decide whether companies need to seek such names individually if they want them across all suffixes, including ".com," ".info" and ".biz."

Single-letter names under ".com," ".net" and ".org" were set aside in 1993 as engineers grew concerned about their ability to meet the expected explosion in demand for domain names. They weren't sure then whether a single database of names could hold millions - more than 40 million in the case of ".com" today.

Six single-letter names already claimed at the time - "q.com," "x.com," "z.com," "i.net," "q.net," and "x.org" - were allowed to keep their names for the time being.

One idea was to create a mechanism for splitting a single database into 26 - one corresponding to each letter. So instead of storing the domain name for The Associated Press under ".org," it would go under "a.org." In other words, "ap.org" would become "ap.a.org."

Now, engineers have concluded that won't be necessary. They have seen the address database grow to hold millions of names without trouble, so they are now willing to let go of the single-letter names they had reserved.

(There are no immediate plans to release two-letter combos that have been reserved under some suffixes - they were set aside not for technical reasons but to avoid confusion with two-letter country-code suffixes such as ".fr" for France.)

Meanwhile, a handful of companies have asked ICANN to free up the single characters. Overstock.com Inc., for instance, prefers a single-letter brand of ".o.com" because its newer businesses no longer fit its original mission of providing discounts on excess inventory.

The ICANN board must now decide whether and how to release the names. At its meeting Sunday, it could ask staff to come up with a proposal or refer the matter to an ICANN committee for further study.

Matt Bentley, chief executive of domain name broker Sedo.com LLC, said single-letter ".com" names could fetch six-figure sums, and a few might even command more than \$1 million from some of the Internet's biggest companies. Yahoo Inc. applied for a trademark to "y.com" this year.

"Obviously there's nothing more exquisite than names that are in extremely rare supply like that," Bentley said. "They would have a lot of cachet as a brand name. I could see there would be tons of demand."

EU Expects Rush for '.eu' Domain Name

The European Union expects a surge of applications next week when its ".eu" regional domain name opens for registration.

"I expect a real rush, several hundred thousand in the first few days," EU Information Society Commissioner Viviane Reding told reporters Thursday. "European companies should waste no time and register for the new '.eu' domain name."

Reding and other supporters believe such a domain will help promote European identity and create greater visibility for pan-European e-commerce. Currently, businesses must use domains for their particular country, such as ".fr" for France, or a global one like ".com," which is seen by some as mostly a U.S. suffix.

Registration for ".eu" names begins on Dec. 7 at 10 a.m. GMT, and such names can be used immediately.

For the first two months, only certain rights holders such as registered trademark owners, public bodies and companies can register. On Feb. 2, ".eu" opens up to family names. General registration begins April 7 on a first-come, first-served basis.

Reding said the restricted periods were needed "to reduce considerably the risk of cyber-squatting" - the illicit use of domain names for fraudulent use.

Such periods, known as sunrise, are typical these days as new domains get introduced.

The ".eu" domain name will be run by EURid, a private European nonprofit group. About 750 licensed resellers will accept registrations on EURid's behalf.

Registrations are limited to people who live in the EU and to companies with headquarters or branches inside the 25-nation bloc.

Prices are expected to range from euro80 to euro140 (\$94 to \$164) during the sunrise periods. They should drop to euro25 to euro30 (\$29 to \$35) once regular registration begins.

There are about 250 domain names on the Internet, but they are typically assigned by country or territory.

The Internet's key oversight agency, the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers, made an exception because EU is on a special "reserved" list kept by the International Organization for Standards, a worldwide standardization body.

ICANN also is considering a ".asia" name for that continent.

Firefox 1.5 Hits the Streets Running

The latest iteration of the open-source browser Firefox is now available for download, featuring upgrades designed to improve navigation, boost security, and provide even more capabilities for a growing number of users.

Firefox 1.5 arrives a year after the browser's debut by the Mozilla Foundation, which recently reported hitting the 100 million download mark.

"We have spent 18 months under the hood to improve the product, which now offers faster page-loads, a drag and drop feature for tabbed browsing, and better pop-up blocking," said Mike Schroepfer, vice president of engineering at Mozilla.

Schroepfer cited the automatic-update function as a noteworthy improvement, enabling users to install the browser once and receive security updates, with prompts to upgrade, as they are released.

A next-generation rendering and layout engine is designed not only to speed navigation between previously viewed Web pages through intelligent caching, but also to display complex Web pages more accurately. Firefox 1.5 also has a new user-controllable interface for blocking viruses, spyware, and pop-ups, including flash-based ads.

The new Clear Private Data tool adds a layer of security by letting users hide all personal data, including browsing history, cookies, auto fill-in form entries, and passwords, said Schroepfer.

Support for Scalable Vector Graphics (SVG), JavaScript 1.6, and Cascading Style Sheets (CSS) also are provided, while users can customize the browser through some 800 third-party extensions. SVG is a specification for rendering two-dimensional graphics in browser interfaces. It works much like Macromedia's proprietary Flash technology but is an open standard.

The ranks of Firefox users have grown substantially over the past year, indicating that it is nibbling away at Internet Explorer's formidable market share.

NetApplications, in a recent Web site traffic analysis, reported that Firefox averaged 8.59 percent of the browser usage market throughout October, up from 2.69 percent in January but below the peak of 8.71 percent in June. In contrast, Microsoft's Internet Explorer currently enjoys an 86 percent market share.

Gartner analyst Ray Valdes suggested that Firefox might take a hit after Microsoft's next operating system, Vista, is released and subsequent changes are made to Internet Explorer.

"Much will depend on how Microsoft ties Internet Explorer to its big releases next year," he said. "They may not have planned to emphasize Internet Explorer, but I think Firefox's adoption rate is something they're noticing."

Vista's Features Nearly Complete

Microsoft is accelerating the development of the next version of its Windows client operating system and plans to test a feature-complete version by early next year, a lead on the Windows Vista development team says.

However, Microsoft is not planning to have a second beta of Vista available before the end of the year, said Amitabh Srivastava, corporate vice president of the Windows Core Operating System Development division, on Tuesday. Microsoft plans to provide an update about the next beta of Windows Vista in early 2006.

The company released the first beta of the OS on July 27. Microsoft is still on track to ship Windows Vista in the second half of 2006, Srivastava added.

Microsoft will complete all the features of Windows Vista by the end of December, and will have those features integrated into the OS by early 2006, Srivastava said. Every test build after that will have the entire set of features of Vista, and any changes will be based merely on customer and tester feedback made about those features, he said.

Microsoft is making the move so developers and customers will have more opportunity to help improve the OS so the final version of the product will be of the highest quality possible, Srivastava said. "This will allow us to receive meaningful feedback much earlier and have code that will more accurately reflect [the final release]," he said.

Microsoft also is changing the release schedule for Community Technology Previews (CTPs) of Vista, he said. In September, Microsoft began releasing to the public more interim builds, or CTPs, of Windows Vista rather than the previous cycle of two beta releases in an effort to get more feedback on the product.

The company had originally planned to do those monthly, but is changing that to a more quality-based release schedule rather than one based on the calendar, Srivastava said. Instead of shooting for a CTP build every month, Microsoft will release CTPs that will focus on a feature or set of features about which the company wants feedback - for example, Windows Vista's graphical user interface, he said. Once those features in that CTP meet certain minimum requirements, Microsoft plans to release the CTP, he said.

This could result in either more or less CTPs, depending on what technology Microsoft decides to focus on in those test versions. However, Srivastava was quick to stress that Microsoft believes CTPs are a vital way to get public comment about Vista to make it as robust as possible before the

target release date of the second half of 2006, so it will still make available a very regular flow of those previews. "We really value the CTPs so they will be released often," he said.

That said, Microsoft has released a November CTP and plans to release a December CTP before the Christmas holidays, he said. The November CTP, however, was a limited release to customers and partners in Microsoft's Technology Adoption Program.

Gmail Now Scans for Viruses

Google has added a virus scanning feature to its Gmail Web mail service, complementing the existing virus protection based on blocking certain types of file attachments, such as executables.

Google informed users of the new feature on a Web page where the company announces new Gmail features.

Now, Gmail will automatically scan all attachments users send and receive, according to a frequently asked questions section devoted specifically to this new functionality.

Gmail will attempt to clean or remove viruses from infected attachments so that users can access the attachment's information; otherwise, users will not be able to download the attachment. Gmail will also prevent users from sending messages with infected attachments.

Until now, Google has protected Gmail users by blocking messages that carry attachments commonly associated with virus attacks.

Google began rolling out the virus scanning feature this week, so not all users have it yet, a Google spokesperson said Thursday. However, by the end of this week, all users will have it, she said.

Lacking this functionality put Gmail at a competitive disadvantage in the market, an analyst said.

"This was one of the main features they didn't have that other providers did," said Marcel Nienhuis, an analyst with The Radicati Group.

A little over a year ago, a Google official told IDG News Service that the company was working on giving Gmail virus scanning capabilities, possibly by licensing technology from a third party.

The Google spokesperson confirmed on Thursday that Google is licensing the virus-scanning technology from a third party, but she declined to disclose the company's name.

Google launched Gmail in April 2004. It is still in beta test mode. To open an account, users must either request the service from Google by sending the company a text message from a mobile phone or be invited via e-mail by an existing Gmail user.

Despite the absence of virus-scanning capabilities and the hurdles users need to clear to get an account, Gmail seems to have attracted many people to its ranks, Nienhuis said. Now, it will become even more appealing to current and future users, he said.

The lack of virus scanning is probably one key reason why Gmail is still in beta, so it's possible that the service may exit its beta phase now, he said. The other major feature Gmail is missing is a companion calendaring application, he said.

Kazaa Owners Work to Install Filters

The owners of file-sharing network Kazaa were working Monday to install filters aimed at preventing users of the software from swapping copyrighted material.

Federal Court judge Murray Wilcox ordered Kazaa's owners to install the new filters last week as part of landmark music piracy litigation between Kazaa's owners, Sharman Networks, and the Australian record industry.

"Sharman Networks is working towards compliance of the court," Sharman Networks spokeswoman Julie Fenwick said in a statement.

Wilcox gave Sharman until next week to develop a new version of its Kazaa Media Desktop software with a new filtering system built in which will include 3,000 so-called keywords, most likely the names of popular recording artists.

Any searches containing those keywords will be blocked by the filter, in a move aimed at stopping their copyrighted material being swapped by Kazaa users.

Wilcox also told Sharman to use dialogue boxes to urge Kazaa users to download the new software.

"There will have to be filters in place by Dec. 5 or Kazaa will be shut down," Stephen Peach, chief executive of the Australian Record Industry Association, said Monday in a statement to The Associated Press.

However, it is unlikely Kazaa could be shut down as any order would only cover Australian users and the software is used by millions of people around the world to exchange files containing music, movies and other material. Also, users of older versions of the Kazaa software would likely be unaffected by the new version.

In September, a federal court found Kazaa's owners and distributors, led by Sydney-based Sharman, guilty of copyright infringement for failing to rein in illegal file sharing on their popular peer-to-peer network.

Wilcox said in his September ruling it had been in the financial interest of Sharman and its partners "to maximize, not minimize, music file-sharing."

A hearing to set damages is expected sometime next year. Sharman is appealing the verdict.

A lawsuit seeking to potentially cover hundreds of thousands of America Online Inc. subscribers accuses the Time Warner Inc. unit of illegally billing customers by creating secondary accounts for them without their consent.

The lawsuit, filed last month in St. Clair County Circuit Court on behalf of 10 AOL customers in six states, claims the company confused and deceived customers about the charges, stalled them from canceling unauthorized accounts and refused to return questioned fees.

"AOL exploits its subscribers' confidential billing information to unlawfully generate additional revenue by charging subscribers for additional membership accounts that they neither order nor request," the lawsuit alleges, calling the scheme "common, uniform and continuing."

The lawsuit, seeking class-action status, mirrors more than a dozen other actions that have been pending in state and federal courts throughout the country, said Stuart Talley, a Sacramento, Calif., attorney representing the plaintiffs in the Illinois lawsuit. All of the federal cases were consolidated in California two years ago, Talley said.

Nicholas Graham, an AOL spokesman, said the Dulles, Va.-based company considers the Illinois lawsuit "a legal rehash that has as much legal value as refiling your personal income taxes from four years ago."

"The important thing is that we deny the allegations now as we've done several times, and we will defend this case as we have other cases accordingly," he said, noting that AOL "takes extraordinary efforts to resolve any issues the members raise."

"We have safeguards in place now that prevent unauthorized charges, and we have credit and refund policies that do justice to the consumer," he said.

The lawsuit also names ICT Group Inc., a Newtown, Pa.-based outsourcing company AOL retained to respond to customer complaints and billing matters. Messages with ICT seeking comment were not immediately returned Friday.

Plaintiffs include an Illinoisan, two Californians, three Tennesseans, a West Virginian, two Alabamans and a New Yorker.

No hearing date has been set on the Illinois case, which accuses AOL of violating Illinois' Consumer Fraud and Deceptive Business Practices Act.

The latest lawsuit alleges that AOL misrepresented that subscribers may add up to seven different screen names to a membership account for free. But AOL "in many instances" spun off those screen names into additional membership accounts without the subscribers' knowledge, then charged and collected a separate monthly fee for each account.

The company requires members to pay charges and fees by credit card, electronic withdrawals from their bank accounts or by adding to their telephone bills, giving subscribers no opportunity to review a bill before making a payment, the lawsuit claims.

To maintain its customer base, according to the lawsuit, AOL has instructed customer-service contractors such as ICT to prevent AOL subscribers from canceling their accounts "at all costs" and to resist giving refunds. Customers who complain are offered at least one month of free AOL Internet service instead of refunds or credits, while "unsatisfied customers who insist on canceling or terminating their AOL memberships are obstructed and

delayed from doing so," the lawsuit claims.

New York-based Time Warner - the world's largest media company - has been holding exploratory talks with companies including Microsoft Corp. about a potential investment in or sale of AOL, which has become a hot property because of its booming advertising sales and ability to draw in large audiences online.

AOL long was seen as a drag on Time Warner due to the steady decline of the dial-up Internet access business. But in recent months AOL successfully has been revamping its business model, moving away from the subscription business and selling more online advertising.

Service Lets Users Store Music on Internet

The founder of the original MP3.com Web site for downloading music has launched a service that lets computer users store their music files on the Internet and retrieve from pretty much anywhere.

Users can synch up their files and playlists to multiple computers, personal digital assistants and, eventually, mobile phones and other devices, said Michael Robertson, chief executive of San Diego-based MP3tunes. It's also a way for music lovers to safeguard their musical collections, in case their computers crash.

"For iTunes (Music Store) users, for example, ... if your computer gets broken or stolen, you can't download that music again," Robertson said.

Oboe costs \$39.95 a year and includes unlimited storage and bandwidth. A free version lets users to upload content and stream it to other computers but does not allow for downloading and offline play.

The venture is Robertson's second attempt at bringing to market a digital "music locker" service. In 1999, he bought hundreds of thousands of CDs and made them accessible through MP3.com to people who already owned that CD.

But recording companies sued, and MP3.com ultimately went to the parent of Universal Music.

The Recording Industry Association of America declined to comment Wednesday on the new venture.

Exploiting the Oboe service for piracy might prove cumbersome. Any audio tracks wrapped in copy protection schemes will retain their playback restrictions, and the company says it will try to flag accounts shared by multiple users.

Microsoft Set To Debut Free Classifieds

Looking to cash in on the lucrative online-trading market, Microsoft is testing a classified advertising service that will let MSN users buy and sell merchandise on the Internet.

Dubbed "Fremont," the service is currently available only in-house at the software giant, but is expected to go public within a few weeks. It is designed as an online community marketplace combining ad listings with social networking and other community features.

When the service debuts, shoppers will see a list of linked categories on the front page and will be able to browse or search through the listings.

Those wanting to sell items will be able to control how their ads are distributed, from a broad Internet listing to an MSN Messenger buddy list.

In addition to catering to general consumers, Microsoft will give developers the ability to customize the service, which runs on top of the Windows Live platform. Developers will be able to integrate the listings with Microsoft's Virtual Earth, MSN Alerts, MSN Messenger, Spaces, MSN Shopping, and several other Windows Live offerings.

Microsoft plans to offer the classifieds service for free, supporting it with advertising placed on search-results pages.

Redmond's move into classifieds follows on the heels of Google Base, a similar ad-supported classified service that also is in the testing stage. Both companies are looking to draw customers away from auction site eBay, the top destination site for people selling personal items online.

The Microsoft approach represents an effort to socialize classifieds but with one major difference: Microsoft leverages the social network that already exists in a user's buddy list and address book, noted Forrester Research analyst Charlene Li in a blog posting.

"I see a really nice service shaping up," she wrote. "The classifieds interface is familiar; each category has the expected search fields and the opening page lays out all of the options in a simple manner similar to Craig's List's austere list of links."

Internet-based trading is booming, with the Pew Internet & American Life Project reporting that one in six Internet users in the U.S., or 25 million people, have sold something online.

The survey data showed that, while 17 percent of all U.S. Internet users have sold something online, 30 percent of users with broadband Internet access at home or work have sold personal possessions on the Web. Among people aged between 29 and 40, 26 percent of Internet users have sold something online, compared to 17 percent of Web users aged between 18 and 28.

Online classified ads have boomed as a direct result of the rise in personal sales on the Internet. The number of Americans using online classifieds has shot up 80 percent in the past year, according to data from comScore Media Metrix.

The top five classified sites recorded by the comScore Media Metrix Internet measuring service in October 2005 were Craigslist.org with 8,236,000 unique visitors, Trader Publishing Company with 7,468,000 unique visitors, Cars.com with 4,298,000 unique visitors, Apartments.com with 1,555,000 unique visitors, and Abracat Property with 924,000 unique visitors.

Massachusetts Reconsiders Microsoft Office

Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney has noted that the state is optimistic Microsoft will be able to meet its standard for an open format by the Commonwealth's January 2007 deadline.

Debate has raged in the state since Massachusetts' Information Technology Division proposed that government computers be moved to an open-file format.

The division decided to migrate to the OpenDocument standard, prompting the Governor's office to hold a special committee session in early November to hear more about the choice.

Microsoft recently announced that it would standardize Office document formats, known as Office Open XML, and submit the formats to standards bodies for approval. This move will satisfy state requirements for open standards, Romney's office noted.

The XML-based document formats will appear in Office 12, due out next year. That means Microsoft will have to be sure to make its ship date for the application suite if it wants to meet the Massachusetts deadline.

"The Commonwealth is very pleased with Microsoft's progress in creating an open document format," noted Tom Trimarco, the state's administration and finance secretary, in a statement.

"If Microsoft follows through as planned, we are optimistic that Open Office XML will meet our new standards for acceptable open formats," Trimarco added.

Microsoft has been fighting hard to share details about how Office 12 will mesh well with Massachusetts' aims, noted the company's general manager Alan Yates.

"We're glad we've had the opportunity to explain our approach to openness, he said. "There have been very favorable reactions to our open formats so far, and we look forward to continued positive reactions, both in Massachusetts and elsewhere."

But it is likely that the debate is not over. Some industry observers point out that the European standards bodies have yet to accept Microsoft's application, for one thing.

Also, there are still individuals and companies who advocate using OpenDocument, and they are expected to push for the format's adoption in the state.

WinZip 10 Compression Utility

WinZip, a well-known name in software compression, recently unveiled the latest version of its long-standing utility. Available in either Standard or Pro editions, WinZip 10 provides something for everyone needing an all-encompassing compression tool.

WinZip 10 installs in just minutes. Just download the file from the

company's Web site, click a few buttons, and you're ready to go.

The application's interface has not changed that much over earlier versions of the software. You have the option of selecting classic or wizard formats, along with a new Internet Explorer interface for those who feel more comfortable working in a browser-style environment.

Using WinZip is a walk in the park. Regardless of the interface you use, you simply select the files you want and the application does the rest. Advanced features are available, but these only take a few moments to learn. Altogether, WinZip has done an excellent job of making this program user-friendly.

While most people probably will use WinZip only to decompress or compress large files, others might appreciate a few new features designed to make the program more functional.

In addition to including two new zip file formats, the company added a new automated-compression feature. If you need files zipped at regular intervals, you can schedule the tasks and have WinZip do all the work without you in the room.

Those who work with a lot of multimedia content also will have something to smile about with the new zip-to-disk feature. WinZip cuts the middleman out of the picture and now lets you zip and burn at the same time.

This zip-and-burn feature and the automation function come only with the Pro version. The Standard version, for the most part, offers the same features as WinZip 9.0, with the exception of improved compression efficiency and new interface options.

WinZip 10 is a great utility regardless of which version you buy. If you need to get the absolute most out of a zipping utility, though, the WinZip Pro is the way to go.

Pros: New Internet Explorer-style interface; excellent scheduling feature; zip-and-burn capability.

Cons: Best features are available only in the Pro version.

Verdict: WinZip 10 is a great utility regardless of which version you buy. If you need to get the absolute most out of a zipping utility, though, the WinZip Pro is the way to go. For those who like to keep their compression utilities up to date, WinZip 10 is a great choice.

Rating: 4 out of 5

Price: \$29.95 for the Standard version, \$49.95 for the Pro version.

www.winzip.com

Internet Turns Nation into Sellers

The Internet is turning Americans into a nation of salespeople, with growing numbers of Internet users going online to make money from unwanted items.

"One in six Internet-using adults in the U.S., or 25 million people, have sold something online," said Amanda Lenhart, a senior research specialist at Pew Internet & American Life Project. "The figure is higher for Web users who have access to broadband Internet connections."

Lenhart said she expects Internet sales of personal items to increase after the holidays. "It will be very interesting to see what happens in January," she said.

Funded by the Pew Charitable Trust, the Pew Internet & American Life Project is a nonprofit and nonpartisan research center that studies the social effects of the Internet on Americans.

"The Internet is providing people with the 'anytime, anywhere' yard sale," Lenhart said. "People are able to sell to a wider variety of potential customers than those who visit a local yard sale."

A nationwide telephone survey carried out by Pew found that people who sell items online come from all points on the demographic spectrum.

However, Internet sellers are particularly likely to be male, in their 30s, relatively affluent, and well-educated, according to Pew. They also are likely to be relatively intense users of the Internet who have broadband connections and go online frequently.

The survey data showed that, while 17 percent of all U.S. Internet users have sold something online, 30 percent of users with broadband Internet access at home or work have sold personal possessions on the Web. Among people aged between 29 and 40, 26 percent of Internet users have sold something online, compared to 17 percent of Web users aged between 18 and 28.

For its survey, Pew spoke to 2,251 American adults (aged 18 and older), including 1,577 Internet users, between September 13 and October 14, 2005.

Online auction site eBay is the number one destination site for people selling personal items online, Lenhart said. "There are purchasing risks associated with eBay, but this does not seem to deter people," she said.

"One advantage of eBay is that customers can pull out of a potential purchase if they are not satisfied."

Online classified ads have boomed as a direct result of the rise in personal sales on the Internet. "The number of Americans using online classifieds has shot up 80 percent in the past year, according to data from comScore Media Metrix," Lenhart said.

The top five classified sites recorded by the comScore Media Metrix Internet measuring service in October 2005 were Craigslist.org with 8,236,000 unique visitors, Trader Publishing Company with 7,468,000 unique visitors, Cars.com with 4,298,000 unique visitors, Apartments.com with 1,555,000 unique visitors, and Abracat Property with 924,000 unique visitors.

"By providing local sites, Craigslist allows individuals to sell to a large number of local people," Lenhart said. "Buyers have all the benefits of Internet shopping, but they can see the item before they buy it and they are able to carry their purchases away without having to pay for transportation costs."

Online Rumor Mill Dogs Companies

The e-mail circulating in Washington last month said a former government lawyer knew a guy whose dog had to be put to sleep because he walked on a floor cleaned with Procter & Gamble's Swiffer WetJet, licked his paws and developed liver disease. Two of the cats owned by the man's maid, who also used the product at home, were said to have died, too.

A quick Google search found that the rumor - which started last year - had been totally refuted by Snopes.com and BreakTheChain.org, two websites that are dedicated to online-myth-busting. But it has been neither quick nor easy for P&G to squelch the story, which was also proved false last year by toxicologists at the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.

Thanks to the Internet, hoaxes, legends and scurrilous rumors about companies and their products are living longer than ever. Companies from Target to Starbucks have had to battle a seemingly ceaseless online rumor mill, which is sometimes fueled by myths perpetuated by competitors.

Some targeted companies fear that disputing the rumors can actually make matters worse.

"You always have to balance even having the conversation we're having here," says P&G spokesman Glenn Williams. "We think, 'Gosh, do we want to say anything?'"

But P&G learned long ago that it was best to face a false rumor head-on. Years before the hoax about the "killer" floor cleaner, P&G endured a longer-lasting nasty rumor.

In that case, the stars-and-moon trademark the company used to display in this country was falsely linked to the Rev. Sun Myung Moon in the late 1970s. In the 1980s, the rumor morphed into one that falsely connected the trademark with Satanism. The rumor was disseminated through fliers and, much later, e-mails.

P&G spokeswoman Linda Ulrey says the company solicited support from a range of religious leaders as well as from its employees, who worked to convince members of their own churches that the rumors were false. At one point, fliers began claiming that P&G officials had appeared on TV talk shows confirming the rumor. P&G responded by obtaining letters from those shows saying no P&G executives had appeared on those shows.

Once P&G identified people it said had spread the rumor - some of whom it says worked for competitors - it pressed charges to get them to confess and stop distribution of the information. Some of them did confess, Ulrey says, and litigation is pending against others.

All told, the rumor passed through several cycles from the 1970s through the 1990s. Ulrey says, "You can never really tell" what, if any, impact it might have had on sales. She notes that the "company continued to grow and do well."

David Mikkelson, who co-founded Snopes.com 10 years ago with his wife, Barbara, says that, like gossip, many Internet myths sometimes start with a tiny grain of truth. But then "People extrapolate something completely

unfounded," Mikkelsen says. "Someone, somewhere probably did use the Swiffer and experienced pet death, but you can't say it's related."

The Mikkelsons don't write about every rumor they hear of. They focus on those that seem most widespread. After all, it's easier for them to display a refutation once on their website than to reply by e-mail to everyone who forwards a suspicious rumor.

Sometimes, though, even when they tell people a rumor is unquestionably false - or that the instigator recanted, as in the case of one rumor against Target - Mikkelsen says some people refuse to believe it.

"They'll say, 'But I don't care. I'm boycotting them anyway,'" he says.

The couple have researched claims that more than 25 companies, from Microsoft to Sony to Victoria's Secret, were giving away money to anyone who forwarded promotional e-mails to friends.

"No, you're not going to be receiving money, merchandise or free trips from Bill Gates (or anyone else), no matter how many people you forward this message to," the Mikkelsons counseled on their site.

The Federal Trade Commission got caught up in an Internet hoax this year - and it nearly overwhelmed the agency's telemarketing Do Not Call list. As the tale went, people's cellphone numbers were suddenly going to become available to telemarketers. The bogus rumor unnecessarily worried millions of people.

Lois Greisman, an FTC official in charge of the Do Not Call list, says the list averages about 200,000 calls a week, but that during two big cycles of this e-mail distribution, several million more people called to put their numbers on the list.

Greisman says the rumor may have been started, unintentionally, by someone who'd heard that a cellphone number directory was being compiled.

In any case, it would violate Federal Communications Commission rules to place a telemarketing call to a cellphone.

"It was the quintessential urban myth or legend," Greisman says. "People just pieced together bits of information."

Says Mikkelsen: The rumors are often "promulgated by mostly earnest but woefully misinformed people."

Cyber Monday Marks Online Shopping Season

While the Thanksgiving weekend marked the official start of the holiday shopping season for stores on land, Monday kicks off the season for online retailers. So far, early signs bode well for the rest of the season.

Today, "Cyber Monday," shoppers are hitting the Web. Shop.org says more than 58 million consumers are expected to shop online today from home or at work.

Non-travel online retail sales rose 22 percent to \$1.89 billion for the week ending Friday, compared to year-ago period, according to comScore

Networks, an Internet research firm.

Nielsen/NetRatings said traffic to online shopping sites grew 29 percent year-over-year on Friday.

Yahoo! Shopping reported that the number of visits to its site rose 52 percent on Friday, better than the 30 percent jump expected.

The nation's retailers had a modest start to the holiday shopping season as consumers jammed stores for bargains in the early morning hours Friday but seemed to lose interest as the weekend wore on.

"There was a lot of hype, a lot of promotions and lot of people, but the results were on the lukewarm side," said Michael P. Niemira, chief economist at the International Council of Shopping Centers.

According to ShopperTrak RCT Corp., which monitors sales at more than 45,000 retail outlets, sales for the combined Friday and Saturday period slipped 0.5 percent to \$13.4 billion, from the year-ago period.

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